

Professor Brooke L. Blower
History Department, Boston University
226 Bay State Road, Rm. 307
617-353-8303
bblower@bu.edu

Seminar: Friday 11:15-2:00
Rm: HIS 304
Office Hours:
Mondays 10:00-noon
Fridays 9-10

GRS857: Methods in American Cultural History

This seminar focuses on a variety of methods cultural historians employ to research and write their histories. Rather than undertaking a chronological and comprehensive survey of the literature of American cultural history, our focus will be on theoretical approaches (including from other fields such as anthropology, geography, and sociology) and their practical applications for historians. How does one go about recovering the mental stuff of past societies and to what ends? The primary goal of the course is to make its participants more intelligent readers of cultural history, and to make those who write in the field more skilled, creative, and reflective practitioners of it. The hope is that even those who consider themselves other kinds of historians—political, economic, etc.—may find new tools for their tool kits.

Copies of all the readings have been placed on reserve at Mugar. Finances permitting, it is advisable to buy volumes that will be useful to you as references in years to come.

Assignments:

1. Presentation/seminar leadership (lead one seminar, present once on research resources)
2. Reading responses (1-2 pgs) for 5 weeks, due by 9 a.m on the day of class in question
3. “Ing” paper on a historical practice (15-20 pgs): first try due Thursday, Nov. 2 by 2p.m.; second try due Wednesday Dec. 13

All written work should be submitted to Professor Blower’s mailbox on the third floor of 226 Bay State Road.

Your grade will be based on the overall quality of your written work as well as your contribution to class discussion. Auditors for credit need not complete the writing assignments (though they may in whole or in part), but they should participate in the life of the seminar.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS

Fri., Sept. 8: **Introduction**

Daniel T. Rodgers, "Thinking in Verbs," *Intellectual History Newsletter* 18 (1996): 21-3

Approaches to Studying Cultural History

Fri., Sept. 15: **Thick Description and Cultural Opacity**

Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description" and "Ideology as a Cultural System" in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973)

Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (1984), intro and ch. 2

Michael Braddick, "The Politics of Gesture," *Past & Present* (Supplement 4, 2009): 9-35

Kenneth Greenberg, "The Nose, the Lie, and the Duel in the Antebellum South," *AHR* 95.1 (Feb. 1990)

RECOMMENDED CLASSIC: Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms* (1976)

IN CLASS SOURCES: Charlie Chaplin sings in *Modern Times* (1936)

A. A. Allen televangelizing in the 1960s

Rock concert footage in Boston (1970)

RESOURCE PRESENTATION: A/V resources

Fri., Sept. 22: **Paradigms and Discourses**

Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), chs. 1- first paragraph of ch. 10

Daniel T. Rodgers, *Contested Truths* (1987), preface

Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization* (1995), ch. 1

Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Age of Fracture* (2011), ch. 2

RECOMMENDED CLASSIC: Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *AHR* 90.3 (June 1985)

IN CLASS SOURCES: The Port Huron Statement (1962)

1960s *Playboy* cartoons

RESOURCE PRESENTATION: dictionaries

Fri., Sept. 29: **Playing with Scales**

Richard Brown, "Microhistory and the Post-Modern Challenge," *Journal of the Early Republic* 23.1 (Spring 2003): 1-20

Matti Peltonen, "Clues, Margins, and Monads: The Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research," *History & Theory* 40 (Oct. 2001): 347-59

Ian Tyrrell, "Reflections on the Transnational Turn in United States History: Theory and Practice," *Journal of Global History*, 3 (November 2009), pp. 453-474

Bernhard Struck, Kate Ferris and Jacques Revel. "Introduction: Space and Scale in Transnational History," *International History Review* 33.4 (Dec. 2011), 573-84.

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale* (1991), intro and chapter 2.

Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations* (2006), chapter 2.

RECOMMENDED CLASSIC: Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (1949)

IN CLASS SOURCES: newspaper front pages

Ellis Island oral histories

RESOURCE PRESENTATION: periodicals

Fri., Oct. 6: **Thinking with Things**

Langdon Winner, "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" *Daedalus* 109.1 (Winter 1980): 121-136.

Michael Zakim, "Sartorial Ideologies: From Homespun to Ready-Made," *AHR* 106.5 (Dec. 2001): 1553-86

Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing* (1989), Part II: intro and ch. 2, Part III: intro and ch. 5

Kristen Hoganson, "Buying Into Empire," in Alfred McCoy, ed., *Colonial Crucible* (2009)

William Rankin, "The Geography of Radionavigation and the Politics of Intangible Artifacts," *Technology and Culture* 55.3 (July 2014): 622-674

RECOMMENDED CLASSIC: Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things* (1986)

IN CLASS SOURCES: souvenirs

RESOURCE PRESENTATION: wildcard

Cultural Practices in Historical Context

Fri., Oct. 13: **Trading**

Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart* (1988), 17-40

Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (2008), chs. 2-4

Jonathan Levy, "Contemplating Delivery: Futures Trading and the Problem of Commodity Exchange in the United States, 1875-1905," *AHR* 111.2 (April 2006): 307-335

William Leach, *Land of Desire* (1993), intro., chs. 1-3

RECOMMENDED CLASSIC: Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (1925)

IN CLASS SOURCES: 20th century American art and photography

RESOURCE PRESENTATION: wildcard

Fri., Oct. 20: **Knowing**

James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (1998), introduction and part I

Ian Hacking, "Biopower and the Avalanche of Printed Numbers,"
Humanities in Society 5, no. 3&4 (1982): 279-295

Dan Bouk, *How Our Days Became Numbered* (2015), preface + chapter 5

Nick Cullather, "The Foreign Policy of the Calorie," *AHR* 112.2 (April 2007): 337-64

RECOMMENDED CLASSIC: Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972)

IN CLASS SOURCE: State Department decimal filing system guide

World War I food posters

RESOURCE PRESENTATION: government documents

Fri., Oct. 27: **Mapping**

Richard White, "What is Spatial History?"
<https://web.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/pub.php?id=29>

Philip J. Ethington, "Placing the Past: 'Groundwork' for a Spatial Theory of History," *Rethinking History* 11.4 (Dec 2007): 465-93

Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (2011), ch. 4

Ruth Oldenziel, "Islands: The United States as a Networked Empire," in Gabrielle Hecht, ed., *Entangled Geographies: Empire and Technologies in the Global Cold War* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011), 13-41

Andrew Friedman, *Covert Capital: Landscapes of Denial and the Making of U.S. Empire in the Suburbs of Northern Virginia* (2013), chs 1-2

RECOMMENDED CLASSIC: Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (1974)

IN CLASS SOURCES: *The New Negro Motorist Green Book* (1949)

GIS: slave trade in two minutes

Mapping Occupation (Union troops in the South)

Isao Hashimoto, “1945-1998”

RESOURCE PRESENTATION: maps

Thurs., Nov. 2: First draft paper due by 2 pm to Prof. Blower’s mailbox

Fri., Nov. 3: **Identifying**

Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond Identity,” *Theory and Society*, 29 (2000): 1-47.

Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally* (2009), chs. 4 and 5

George Chauncey, *Gay New York* (1994), chs. 4 and 7

Craig Robertson, *The Passport in America* (2010), intro., chs. 2, 4, 9-10

RECOMMENDED CLASSIC: Vance Packard, *The Status Seekers* (1959)

IN CLASS SOURCES: Chicago Vice Commission report (1911)

American novels: character sketches

Musical performances

WRITING PRESENTATION: Excerpts from drafts

Fri., Nov. 10: Class cancelled.

Fri., Nov. 17: **Performing**

Erving Goffman, “Communication Out of Character,” in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959)

Peter Burke, “Performing History: The Importance of Occasions,” *Rethinking History* 9.1 (March 2005): 35-52

Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul* (1999), introduction and chs. 3-6

David Scobey, "Anatomy of the Promenade: The Politics of Bourgeois Sociability in Nineteenth-Century New York," *Social History* 17 (1992): 203-227

RECOMMENDED CLASSIC: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1990)

IN CLASS SOURCES: William B. Huie, "The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi," *Look* (1956)

Scene from *Some Like It Hot* (1959)

WRITING PRESENTATION: Draft excerpts

Fri., Dec. 8: **Lawmaking**

Nina Dayton, "From Godly Rules to Lawyerly Habits: Scenes from the New Haven Courtroom" in *Women Before the Bar* (1996).

"Introduction: Legal Histories from Below," 759-66 and Hendrik Hartog, "Pigs and Positivism," 899-936 both in *Wisconsin Law Review*, Issue 4 (1985).

Michael Willrich, *City of Courts* (2003), chs. 1 and 3.

Eileen Scully, "Taking the Low Road to Sino-American Relations: 'Open Door' Expansionists and the Two China Markets," *Journal of American History* 82.1 (June 1995): 62-83.

RECOMMENDED CLASSIC: Robert Gordon, "Critical Legal Histories" *Stanford Law Review* (1984).

IN CLASS SOURCES: Harvard Law School exam, 1921

MLK, "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (1963)

WRITING PRESENTATION: Draft excerpts

Wed., Dec 13: Final paper due, by 2pm to Prof. Blower's mailbox